

FOOD SHORTAGES, DOGS AND "ONE-WAY" BREAD

During the 18th century there were several years in which there were poor harvests, so that there was insufficient wheat and flour to meet demand for a full 12 months before the next harvest came round. As supplies dwindled so prices rose - often dramatically.

With the same amount of money buying less flour or bread, the plight of the very poor, who were on parish relief, became desperate. Few were unaffected and those on low wages also found they had insufficient to feed their families and so were forced to seek relief from the parish.

The years 1765, 1766, 1795 and 1800 saw an escalation in prices, as shortages affected the whole country. In each of these years the Overseers of High Littleton were forced to make special arrangements to deal with the situation and it is interesting to look in detail at a specific year to see how they coped.

On 27 Jul 1795, the Vestry met *"to consider some method for relieving the distresses of the poor, arising from the high price of provisions"* and agreed unanimously:-

- 1. To reimburse James BUSH and Robert BRODRIBB for the loss that was sustained on delivering to the poor 65 pecks of flour (this was part of an earlier arrangement whereby the parish decided to subsidise the increases in price of flour).*
- 2. That they would use in their own families no other bread than that which is called "one-way bread", made from the flour of wheat from which the broad bran only is separated, and to recommend the consumption of the same throughout the parish.*
- 3. That those already on parish relief should have a 25% increase until further notice.*
- 4. That 46 poor and distressed inhabitants of High Littleton and 12 of Hallatrow should receive a weekly allowance of the above mentioned flour at the rate of 3/- per peck until further notice (weekly allowances ranged from 7 lb. to 36 lb. depending on the size of the families).*
- 5. That a sum not exceeding £20 should be paid by the Overseer to Mr. LANSDOWN for effecting the above purpose and that he be requested to superintend it's appropriation.*
- 6. That as dogs at all times, but particularly in this time of scarcity, are esteemed unnecessary and useless in poor families, no person who persists in keeping any dog, on any account, shall participate in this bounty. Furthermore, the Overseer is particularly directed to withhold the weekly relief of any pauper who shall keep or refuse to dispose of any dog or dogs he or they may now be possessed of.*
- 7. That 55lb. of bacon, now in the Overseer's possession, the prime cost of which is 6d. per lb.. shall be sold to 16 named families in equal proportions, or to such of them as desire it, at 6d. per lb. for the best pieces and 4d. per lb. the residue.*

The Vestry met on a weekly basis during the crisis and renewed the arrangements each week. On 10 Aug it was resolved that a barrel of rice, purchased by the Vestry for £10.16.6, should be sold at 3d. per lb. to all the poor persons resident in the parish, whose names were mentioned in lists delivered to James BUSH and James WEEKS. The purchase of further sacks of wheat and flour were authorised and the Overseers continued the sale of flour, rice, bacon etc. at below cost price. The crisis seems to have subsided by the beginning of September, presumably as the new crops were harvested. The balance due to James BUSH for the loss on sale of the provisions was duly paid by the Overseers, who were ordered by the Vestry to draw up accounts showing the cost to the parish of the support operation, which was met by an increase in the Poor Rate for that year.

These days health food shops would charge extra for "one-way" bread. There is no record of the number of dogs "disposed of"!

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